

A'am al-Bina'a

"The year of 2008 will be a year of reconstruction for Iraq"
-- Prime Minister Nuri Al-Maliki



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Tech College showcases ability of artists, community in Rashid district

Baghdad Soldiers joined artists, musicians and Iraqi citizens to celebrate the premier of an art exhibition Nov. 26 in southern Baghdad's Rashid district.

The Iraqi artists assembled more than 100 works of art at the Doura Technical College to showcase their ability in the local community, an epicenter of commerce for the eastern Rashid area.

Community leaders and local patrons filled rooms prepared with paintings, sculptures and photographs portraying the exhibition's theme: "New Life, New Culture."

Doura, a neighborhood with a reputation for its intense sectarian



An Iraqi woman and two Iraqi children observe art being showcased at the Doura Technical College. It is the first grand opening art show the area has had in many years, Nov. 26, in southern Baghdad, Iraq.

violence, has seen progress since the arrival of Coalition forces in November 2007, said Lt. Col. Timothy Watson, a Coalition force commander.

"We think the event shows incredible work by the people of Doura to bring the community back to life," said Watson.

Watson described the art show as the pinnacle of social events in his area of operations.

"The people of Rashid are ready for art; they are ready for a sophisticated reputation," said Capt. Brett Walker, an in-

fantry officer with Coalition forces.

The Soldiers offered their assistance to facilitate the five-day event; however, it remained an Iraqi-led event, said Walker.

"It's a new national identity that will endure for ages," said Walker.

Faruq Fu'ad Rafiq Hamdani, a featured artist and event organizer, said he believes everybody continually worked hard to set up for the art and culture show.

It took Hamdani 20 days to prepare supplies and artwork for the show. He said he credits the exhibition to the true efforts of both Iraqis and Coalition forces.

Hashem Mahmood, the deputy chairman of the Rashid District Counsel, said the variety of artwork served as a canvas for the Iraqi people's concerns.



Iraqi civilians and government leaders gather for the grand opening art show at the Doura Technical College.



Soldiers assigned to the 1st Azerbaijani Peacekeeping Company, the last Azerbaijani unit to serve in Anbar, fold up their flag during a ceremony held on Al-Asad Airbase Dec. 3 to bid the company farewell. Over 11 rotations, more than 1,000 Azerbaijanis served in Iraq.

Ceremony marks end of service for Azerbaijani Company in Iraq

Coalition forces thanked soldiers assigned to the 1st Azerbaijani Peacekeeping Company for their service in Iraq at a ceremony held on Al-Asad Airbase Dec. 3 as the Azerbaijanis ended their mission in Iraq.

"This is a historic day for the nation of Iraq and the nation of Azerbaijan, but it's a bittersweet day in the sense that we must say farewell to our partners in the Coalition," said Maj. Gen. Michael Ferriter, deputy commanding general for operations Iraq.

Azerbaijani forces arrived Aug. 15, 2003, to begin their mission in Iraq guarding the Haditha Dam.

Members of the 1st Azerbaijani PC have devoted the last year to continuing the mission of providing security for the dam, the most critical piece of infrastructure in western Anbar province.

The Azerbaijani soldiers manned all of the exterior checkpoints and scanned the waters of Lake Qadisiyah to the north and the Euphrates to the south for insurgent activity among other activities.

Thanks to the Azerbaijanis' efforts, control of the dam was transferred to the Iraqi government in a ceremony attended by al-Kumanji Mawafek Mohammed, Director of Real Estate and Maj. Gen. Martin Post, Multi-National Force – West deputy commanding general.

"The victory story about the Azerbaijanis is that peace is breaking out in al-Anbar," said Col. Patrick Malay, the commanding officer of Camp Pendleton.

Iraqi Army thank Bosnians for mission

In a ceremony at Hope Chapel on Victory Base Complex Nov. 29, a contingent of military forces from Bosnia-Herzegovina, were honored for their service in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. The historic event marked the end of a commitment that started in June 2005.

"We hope the soldiers from Bosnia-Herzegovina met their tasks with success and fulfilled your and our expectations and justified invested efforts. To the people of Iraq we wish that just like in our country that you can overcome every trouble and advance peace and prosperity," said Brig. Gen. Stamenko Novakovic, commander of the 6th Infantry Brigade Bosnia-Herzegovina Armed Forces..

Working with Coalition forces, the Bosnian-Herzegovina soldiers assisted in base defense by working in tower security operations as well as internal presence patrols.

Command Sgt. Maj. Steven Veazey presented the Army Achievement Medal to all of the Bosnia-Herzegovina soldiers for services rendered from August to December 2008.

Addressing the Bosnian-Herzegovina soldiers, Maj. Gen. Khudaier Abass of the Iraqi Army said, "On behalf of the Iraqi Army and all Iraqi people I give thanks and admiration."

Abass paused for a moment, and then provided an invitation to the soldiers in the room to one day come back to Iraq—as guests.



Leadership salutes each nation's flag during a ceremony Nov. 29 on Victory Base where military forces from Bosnia-Herzegovina were honored by their Coalition partners for service in Operation Iraqi Freedom.



Sgt. 1st Class Nevin Gordner, 398th Command Sustainment Support Battalion, teaches a boy archery, while other children gather to watch, during a troop scout meeting in southern Baghdad Nov. 22.

Service members devote time to Scouts

The scouting movement in Iraq was revitalized in 2004 by the Green Zone Council, a group of Coalition forces in Baghdad who saw value in having Iraqi children involved with their communities.

Iraq had a scouting program up until the 1980s, but the World Organization Scouting Movement decertified the program after they realized Saddam Hussein was using it to train children as paramilitary youths.

For roughly 20 years following decertification, the scouting movement simply didn't exist in Iraq. Today, service members work with the youth of Iraq Saturday afternoons in a small community just outside the Victory Base Complex.

Lt. Cmdr. Eric Fretz and other U.S. service members decided to start their own Victory Base Council, which brings troops together with schoolchildren from areas in southern Baghdad.

"We can work together and create this great program for these kids, and then they get all kinds of good life skills out of it," said Fretz.

"I'm a scout master back home and so I have a small troop back home, and I thought I'd like to get involved and help out with the children here in Iraq," said Sgt. 1st Class Nevin Gordner, a Coalition Soldier.

The service members volunteer their time to teach up to 80 children valuable scouting lessons and new sport

activities. They organize at least one scout craft, a team-building exercise and rotate between sports, including soccer, football, ultimate Frisbee and even archery.

Now that this project is steadily moving forward, the council members are also working with scouting adults so they may continue once Coalition forces withdraw.

"I think my biggest mission for the next eight months is probably to get the Iraqi adults more involved so that they're actually teaching and running the program," said Maj. Cheryl Hanke, the scout leader who will replace Fretz when he redeploys soon.



Sgt. Shannon LeMaster, 301st Military Intelligence Battalion, helps a young Iraqi girl with her craft.

Sadr City residents transform city with parks, clean streets

In the not too distant past, Sadr City was considered by many to be one of the worst places to live in Iraq. There was trash in the streets, violence throughout the district, sewage-filled gutters that overflowed onto the roads and children played on trash piles containing concertina wire and rubble from houses – the remnants of the violent fighting that drove Special Groups elements out of the area.

Now, when Soldiers with Multi-National Division – Baghdad go on patrol they see a radically different landscape.

Parks have emerged from previously vacant lots; children run rampant, enjoying themselves on previously prohibited playgrounds. Trash piles disappear seemingly overnight and concertina wire no longer blocks sidewalks and passageways. The streets are clean. The sewers function as they are supposed to, eliminating not only an offensive odor, but also a pressing health hazard to the citizens of Sadr City's Tharwa 1 neighborhood.

Buildings are freshly painted in bright colors and storefronts are redone to present a welcome appearance. While some of this work has been done by private business, much of it has been completed due to the efforts of Iraqis volunteering to clean their own sectors and neighborhoods. These local nationals are showing pride in their communities and it is beginning to show.



Youth of Sab al-Bour participate in Civil Pride Day

Young citizens help pick up trash in the neighborhood. Coalition forces along with members of the Sab al-Bour Essential Services Committee celebrated Civil Pride Day by taking to the streets and encouraging business owners and residents to help them promote a cleaner community.

Recently, there was a big push to remove trash from the main streets and collect it into one or two locations for pick up by the Beladiyah, the office responsible for many of the public services in Iraq.

The overall effect of the volunteer efforts is a cleaner, and safer, Tharwa. Removing trash and painting buildings means it is harder to hide roadside bombs in trash piles and snipers cannot lurk in the bombed-out shells of buildings. The people will also benefit from a more hygienic environment.

"I feel safer out in sector," said Pfc. David Beveridge, a Coalition Soldier. "The clean streets make it easier to see obstacles and means that we can spot suspicious objects faster, saving both our own lives and any innocent bystanders."

A member of the District Advisory Council, a mid-level government official, and a local shaykh gave their support by providing tools and labor for the many projects happening in Tharwa 1. Their participation is a clear signal to the people that it is time to unshackle themselves from the grip of criminals and instead enjoy the opportunity to better themselves and their communities.

U.S. forces have noticed the change in the atmosphere as well.

"After being here for almost eight months I am beginning to see a real change in attitudes of the people," Spc. Richard Parr, a Coalition Soldier. "The people are friendlier and while security is still our primary mission, I am able to enjoy both an educational and cultural experience each time I go out on patrol."